

Chapter 6 - Professional Development

. . . the teacher [of the gifted and talented] has the most significant influence on a learning environment. Many factors influence the learning of a student, but within the classroom situation, the teacher is of critical importance.

—Barbara Clark
Growing Up Gifted

Introduction

Regulation 43-220 calls for staff development as part of gifted and talented support services and requires that appropriate, on-going staff development in gifted education be provided annually by districts ((24 S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 43-220.2(A)(1)(b))and (C)(2)). Furthermore, districts are required to provide training regarding characteristics of academic giftedness for all staff involved in the identification process ((24 S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 43-220.2(B)(6)(b)(3)).

Professional development in the area of gifted and talented education should be an integral part of a school district's staff development plan. It is essential that the plan include professional development experiences for the total school staff, as well as specialized experiences for teachers in the gifted and talented program.

To assist districts in their staff development efforts, the State Department of Education (SDE) is working to provide professional development for total school staff and endorsement for teachers in gifted and talented programs. The SDE collaborates with the South Carolina Consortium for Gifted Education to provide regional and statewide professional development for gifted and talented coordinators and teachers.

This chapter addresses the professional development needs of both groups—total school staff (administrators, guidance counselors, regular classroom teachers) and teachers of the gifted and talented. Chapter 10 of this manual provides further information on the roles and responsibilities of each group with regard to the gifted and talented program.

Professional Development for Total School Staff

Administrators

Administrators must be able to communicate knowledgeably with parents and the public about the gifted and talented program. The following competencies are needed:

- ◆ Knowledge of R43-220 (amended June, 2004) to ensure district and building level compliance,
- ◆ Understanding of characteristics of gifted and talented students and their special needs as the basis for gifted and talented education, and
- ◆ Familiarity with the curriculum and the instructional practices in the gifted and talented program.

Guidance Counselors

Guidance counselors require depth of knowledge about the gifted and talented program and about gifted and talented students—their identification, needs, and special problems. The competencies required of guidance counselors include the following:

- ◆ Knowledge of R43-220 (amended June, 2004),
- ◆ Knowledge of characteristics of gifted and talented students,
- ◆ Knowledge of the identification and placement process,
- ◆ Knowledge of record keeping requirements,
- ◆ Ability to provide counseling appropriate to the special needs and problems of gifted and talented students, and
- ◆ Ability to provide appropriate academic, college, and career guidance for gifted and talented students.

Regular Classroom Teachers

To better meet the needs of gifted and talented students, teachers in the general education classroom require the following competencies:

- ◆ Knowledge of the characteristics of gifted and talented students,
- ◆ Understanding of the diversity among all students, and
- ◆ Skills in differentiating curriculum and instruction for all students in the classroom.

Professional Development for Teachers of the Gifted and Talented

Education of the gifted and talented is a form of special education with its own pedagogy specifically designed to meet the needs of this particular group of students (Borland, 1989). To enter the field of gifted education as professionals, teachers require extensive formal education in recognizing the characteristics and needs of gifted and talented students and in developing and implementing curriculum appropriate to those needs.

Teachers of the gifted and talented must possess a high level of the knowledge and skills listed for regular classroom teachers (page 6-2). In addition, they require exceptional competencies in the following areas:

- ◆ Advanced knowledge and skills in their certification area/discipline,
- ◆ Knowledge of historic and current gifted and talented issues, research, and practices,
- ◆ Skill in presenting gifted and talented topics and issues to school staff, parents, and the community,
- ◆ Skill in developing collaborative and positive relationships with all staff, families, and students,
- ◆ Skill in developing and implementing challenging educational experiences that help students go beyond their current level of competencies, and
- ◆ Skill in providing an environment conducive to exploration, trial and error learning, and investigation.

Gifted and Talented Teacher Endorsement

For a number of years, the SDE has funded graduate courses in the nature and needs of gifted learners and introduction to curriculum for gifted learners. These two courses are required for teacher endorsement in gifted education and address foundational professional development needs of teachers of the gifted and talented. Although these courses are beneficial and will continue, best practices suggest that more extensive training that is ongoing is necessary for teachers to establish full professional credentials in the field of gifted education.

On-Going Professional Development

Along with a solid foundation in gifted education provided through initial coursework, teachers of the gifted and talented require on-going professional development. It is the professional responsibility of each teacher in the gifted and talented program to seek opportunities for continued growth, such as those listed on the next page.

- ◆ Membership in relevant professional organizations—e.g.,
 - National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC): www.nagc.org
 - Council for Exceptional Children (CEC): www.cec.sped.org
 - The Association for the Gifted (TAG): <http://coe.hp.idbsu.edu/tag>
 - South Carolina Consortium for Gifted Education (SCCGE):
P.O. Box 255, Irmo, SC 29063 www.scgifted.org
- ◆ Subscription or access to journals in the field—e.g.,
 - *Gifted Child Quarterly*
 - *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*
 - *Roeper Review*
 - *Gifted Child Today*
- ◆ Attendance at conferences, workshops, and institutes—e.g.,
 - NAGC annual conference
 - SCCGE annual conference
 - Confratute, a two week institute held each July at University of Connecticut
 - Spring (March) and Summer (June) Conferences held at the Center for Gifted Education at The College of William and Mary
- ◆ Recent series publications and websites—e.g.,
 - *The Practical Strategies Series* (Prufrock Press www.prufrock.com)
 - *The Essential Readings Series* (Corwin Press www.corwinpress.com)
 - *The Critical Thinking Series* (Foundation for Critical Thinking www.criticalthinking.org)
 - SC Department of Education's Office of Gifted and Talented
 - National Research Center for Gifted www.gifted.uconn.edu
 - The Center for Gifted Education www.cfge.wm.edu

School districts are required to provide appropriate, on-going staff development activities for teachers of the gifted and talented (24 S.C. Code Ann. Regs. 43-220.2(C)(2)). As part of this requirement, districts should support professional development opportunities such as attendance at conferences, workshops, and institutes. In addition, the district staff development plan should include in-district programs on topics such as underachievement, instructional strategies, special

populations, and differentiated curriculum. Consortia arrangements and regional groups with nearby districts can facilitate the availability of appropriate staff development for teachers of the gifted and talented.

Designing and Evaluating Professional Development for Teachers

This section summarizes several important points taken from VanTassel-Baska's article, "Planning professional development experiences in gifted education" published in the 2002 *Virginia Association for the Gifted Newsletter*.

Research-based features of highly effective professional development (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001 in VanTassel-Baska, 2002)) include the following:

- A strong focus on content knowledge (especially differentiation, grouping, and assessment strategies matched to the gifted learner).
- Opportunities for active learning.
- Coherence with other learning activities.
- Sustained intensive opportunities.
- Collective participation.

Drawing on Guskey's model (2000) as a guide to planning, these questions need consideration when designing professional development.

- 1) What knowledge and skills do you want educators to acquire about gifted students and their learning?
- 2) Under what delivery mode will the educators best acquire these understandings (e.g., study groups, workshops, action research, mentoring)?
- 3) What organizational support structures are in place to facilitate change?
 - a) Are adequate resources available for classroom implementation?
 - b) Will implementation be monitored? How?
 - c) Is the climate supportive of experimentation?
- 4) How will program coordinators assess the application of the knowledge and skills acquired?
- 5) What was the impact on gifted students of educators acquiring new knowledge and skills?

Finally, VanTassel-Baska offers these professional development guidelines for educators of the gifted:

- 1) Target four workshops for all teachers on working with gifted students; target four advanced workshops for teachers specialized in gifted education, and target two abbreviated (2–3 hours) workshops for building and central office administrators.

- 2) Establish content priorities for workshops based on program needs, not individual teacher desires. Conduct a needs assessment or use recent evaluation data to determine those program needs.
- 3) Provide follow-up support in each building to ensure that teachers can implement new skills. Provide relevant book and print resources, discuss the plan for implementation with each principal, visit classrooms to “get the feel” for teacher issues and attend a faculty meeting in the building to judge climates.
- 4) Develop a system of monitoring implementation of professional development work. Visit a few classrooms each week with a checklist of teacher behaviors. Discuss observations with teachers. Ask principals to visit classrooms regularly and look for these same instructional behaviors. Work with teacher teams to develop self-monitoring strategies for implementing new strategies.
- 5) Assess gifted student impacts of professional development work through questionnaires, test scores, and/or structured interviews with students and parents.
- 6) Develop a one-year and three-year plan for professional development activities that reflects a compelling improvement plan based on needs assessment and/or evaluation data collected. If you have neither, use the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) professional development standards (NAGC, 1998) as a base to consider what needs to be done. While they do not address specific content foci, they do emphasize best practices in general process areas.
- 7) Develop a collaborative relationship with a university-based center in gifted education to tap into important resources and cost-effective professional development opportunities.
- 8) Be deliberate about all phases of professional development from planning through implementation through follow-up and assessment. Conducting workshops is only the beginning of the effort.
- 9) By incorporating a strong professional development model in your work, program improvements in curriculum, instruction, assessment, communication, and parental involvement should begin to occur.

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Annotated Bibliography

Articles Related to the Professional Development of Educators of Gifted Children Published between 2002 and 2003

Bain, S.K., Bourgeois, S.J., & Pappas, D.N. (2003). Linking Theoretical Models to Actual Practices: A Survey of Teachers in Gifted Education. *Roeper Review*, 25(4), 166–172.

Presents the results of a regional survey of the use of theoretical models for gifted and talented programs at the kindergarten through ninth-grade levels in the U.S. Background on several theoretical models for gifted education; Information on the questionnaires used in the survey; Implications of the results for the importance of the critical thinking skills of teachers in relation to the documented effectiveness of intervention.

Belcastro, F.P. (2002). Electronic Technology and Its Use With Rural Gifted Students. *Roeper Review*, 25(1), 14–16.

Electronic technology can be used to overcome many of the restrictive factors or barriers to delivering services to rural schools, and it can expand the world of rural gifted students. On-line college and high school sites offering courses are listed. Also listed is a site for tutoring and one offering help for teachers of rural gifted students. Recommendations are made for legislatures and for rural school districts.

Croft, L.J. (2003). Teachers of the Gifted: Gifted Teachers. In N. Colangelo & G.A. Davis (Eds.), *Handbook of Gifted Education*, 3rd Ed., (pp. 558–571). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Explores current research in general education about the importance of teachers, especially the unique importance of teachers in gifted education. Best practices, the varying roles expected of teachers of the gifted, and professional development programs are discussed.

Gardner, S.A. (2003). The Unrecognized Exceptionality: Teaching Gifted Adolescents with Depression. *English Journal*, 92(4), 28–32.

Presents information on teaching gifted adolescent students suffering from depression. Lack of teachers' knowledge on the exceptionality of students with mental illness or depression; reasons for the failure of teachers to recognize depression; characteristics of depressed teenagers; recognition of students who are at risk for depression.

Gavin, M.K. & Reis, S.M. (2003). Helping Teachers to Encourage Talented Girls in Mathematics. *Gifted Child Today Magazine*, 26(1), 32–45.

Focuses on the why female gifted students are lag behind in the field of mathematics. Reasons behind the problems of girls in mathematics; Courses of study intended by female high school students for college; Suggested strategies in encouraging girls in mathematics.

Hargrove, K. (2003). 'If You Build It, They Will Come'. *Gifted Child Today Magazine*, 26(1), 30–31.

Presents the comments of students in evaluating their gifted programs and teachers in the U.S. Impact of evaluation on teachers; Background on the advanced programs offered by schools such as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs; Significance of the evaluations given by students.

Hargrove, K. (2003). Images of Teaching. *Gifted Child Today Magazine*, 26(3), 62–63.

Discusses different approaches to educating gifted children in the U.S. Ways of categorizing teachers; Information on teachers as instructional managers; Description of an effective teacher; Implications for teachers of gifted children.

Johnsen, S. (2003). Adapting Instruction With Heterogeneous Groups. *Gifted Child Today Magazine*, 26(3), 5.

Describes how undergraduate special education teacher candidates learned about student differences by teaching homogenous and heterogeneous groups in the U.S. Results of a pretest given to students to determine their knowledge about several topics; Information on the differences in detail and understanding among the students; Background on several independent activities conducted to teach the gifted students.

Kaplan, S.N. (2003). Advocacy as Teaching: The Teacher as Advocate. *Gifted Child Today Magazine*, 26(3), 44–45.

Focuses on the relationship between advocacy and teaching. Role and perspective of teachers of gifted children as advocates; Information on several principles of learning as bases in preparing a lesson plan; Significance of motivational strategies.

Karnes, F.A. & Nugent, S.A. (Fall 2002). Influential people in gifted education. *Gifted Child Today Magazine*, 25(4), 60–64.

The history of gifted education is rich with events and people who have influenced the field for centuries. Johnsen (1999), editor of *Gifted Child Today*, asked members of the editorial board and columnists to submit manuscripts focusing on the identification of significant events in gifted education for the last volume of the 20th century.

Mills, C.J. (2003). Characteristics of Effective Teachers of Gifted Students: Teacher Background and Personality Styles of Students. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 47(4), 272–281.

This study was designed to explore characteristics of exceptional teachers of gifted students. Participants included 63 teachers and 1,247 highly able students. Teachers responded to 2 measures: a background questionnaire and the Myers Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI), a self-report personality inventory. Students also completed the MBTI. In response to the background questionnaire, the majority of teachers reported holding advanced degrees in a content area; most were not certified to teach and reported completing no formal coursework in gifted education. Results from the MBTI indicated that exemplary teachers were more likely to prefer N (intuition) and T

(thinking), as compared to a normative teacher sample. The personality types of teachers were in many ways similar to the personality types of the gifted students. These findings suggest that teachers who are judged to be highly effective in working with gifted students prefer abstract themes and concepts, are open and flexible, and value logical analysis and objectivity. Results suggest that teacher personality and cognitive style may play a role in his or her effectiveness in teaching gifted students.

Mulhern, J.D. (2003). The Gifted Child in the Regular Classroom. *Roeper Review*, 25(3), 112–115.

Examines the extent in which classroom teachers can use accessible information in identifying academically gifted students in the U.S. Limitations of intelligence quotient tests; Major shortcoming of the early research on the academically gifted; Common learning characteristics of the academically gifted. A reprint of the first article ever published in the *Roeper Review*, 1(1), 1978, pages 3-6. Readers can see that 25 years ago we faced many of the same concerns we see in the literature today. Following the article, Dr. Cheryl Adams, director of the Center for Gifted Studies and Talent Development at Ball State University, provides a perspective on the changes that have occurred since Dr. Mulhern's article appeared in 1978. We hope you will enjoy this retrospective.

Nugent, S.A. & Shaunessy, E. (2003). Using Film in Teacher Training: Viewing the Gifted Through Different Lenses. *Roeper Review*, 25(3), 128–134.

Describes the strategies and sample film clips used in educating teachers and graduate students about the characteristics and social-emotional needs of the gifted. Reasons behind the use of film clips as an instructional tool; Analysis of the portrayal of the gifted in cinema; List of films that illustrate the characteristics of gifted children.

Peterson, J.S. (2003). An Argument for Proactive Attention to Affective Concerns of Gifted Adolescents. *Journal of Secondary Gifted Education*, 14(2), 62–71.

To meet affective needs of gifted adolescents, teachers in gifted education can avail themselves of the expertise and resources of school counselors who, especially in recent decades, have been trained to create and implement prevention-oriented, developmental guidance programs. This article provides information about what counselors can offer to gifted adolescents and their teachers, including affective curricula, training in active listening, and facilitation of discussion groups. Other strategies for addressing social and emotional concerns in programs are also presented.

Robinson, E.L. (Fall 2002). What is the School Psychologist's Role in Gifted Education? *Gifted Child Today Magazine*, 25(4), 34–37.

Why would a school psychologist be interested in gifted education and why would individuals from gifted education be interested in the field of school psychology?

Rotigel, J.V. (2003). Understanding the Young Gifted Child: Guidelines for Parents, Families, and Educators. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 30(4), 209–214.

Young children who are gifted or talented share special characteristics that impact on the way they learn and develop. Teachers and parents need to consider the unique needs of each child as they plan ways to nurture and educate these youngsters. Concerns such as uneven development, the need for acceleration and/or enrichment, appropriate socialization and peer interactions, and modification of the curriculum are some of the topics discussed. Suggestions for teachers and parents are included along with a variety of resources.

Nugent, S.A. (2003). Using Film in Teacher Training: Viewing the Gifted Through Different Lenses. *Roeper Review*, 25(3), 128–134.

Describes the strategies and sample film clips used in educating teachers and graduate students about the characteristics and social-emotional needs of the gifted. Reasons behind the use of film clips as an instructional tool; Analysis of the portrayal of the gifted in cinema; List of films that illustrate the characteristics of gifted children.

Siegle, D. (Fall, 2002). Learning Online: A New Educational Opportunity for Teachers and Parents. *Gifted Child Today Magazine*, 25(4), 30–33.

Twenty years ago, parents and teachers who wished to expand their understanding of gifted children and gifted education were limited to reading a few books and journals on the topic. They may have been fortunate enough to live near a university that offered a course in gifted education. Today the situation has changed. Thanks to the Internet, a myriad of educational opportunities exist. (includes relevant websites)

Winebrenner, S. (2003). Teaching Strategies for Twice-Exceptional Students. *Intervention in School & Clinic*, 38(3), 131–137.

For many years, parents and teachers have been perplexed about youngsters who have dramatic learning strengths in some areas and equally dramatic learning weaknesses in others. These students appear to defy accurate labeling: Are they gifted or learning disabled? Finally, the debate has stopped, and educators are now recognizing these students as “twice-exceptional.” Rather than trying to use evidence from their weak learning areas to prove they are not “truly gifted,” savvy teachers are now learning how to allow these students to experience the same opportunities available for gifted students when they are learning in their strength areas. When students are learning in their areas of weakness, teachers are learning to provide the same compensation strategies used by other students with learning disabilities. This article offers specific instruction to empower teachers to effectively teach twice-exceptional students.

Zehr, M.A. (2002). Texas Teachers Sought for Bilingual, Gifted Training. *Education Week*, 22(12), 3.

With the help of a \$1.5 million federal grant, Southern Methodist University in Dallas is starting an unusual scholarship program that will train teachers in both bilingual education and gifted education. Experts in gifted education say they do

not know of any other university that formally offers the same combination of teacher preparation. They hope the new program will give teachers better tools to help identify gifted and talented students who are learning English. They also would like to see it replicated.